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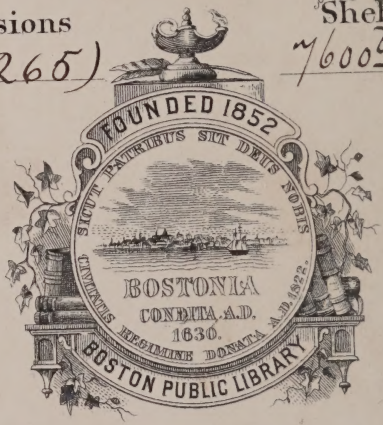

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BASIS

FOR

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS.

BY

A. E. NEWTON.

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(From the *Banner of Light.*)

BASIS FOR LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS.

I have been urgently appealed to in behalf of friends of spiritual progress to draw up and send to you for publication in your widely-circulated paper a Statement of Principles, Objects, Aims of Life, etc., which may serve as a basis for local organizations for the promotion of spiritual truth, and its application to life.

I have given some time and thought to this important matter, and herewith forward the result, hoping that it may be found worthy of a place in your columns, and to contain at least some suggestions that will be of value to those who are seeking aid in this direction. Very truly yours for spiritual progress.

A. E. NEWTON.

VINELAND, N. J.

PRELIMINARY SUGGESTIONS.

The proper object of organized association on the part of friends of spiritual truth is, as the writer apprehends, not to draw a line of self-righteous distinction between believers and unbelievers, saints and sinners, or to set up a test of fellowship and limit to friendly sympathy (as is usually the case in Christian churches), but rather to combine their energies and means in co-operative efforts for the promotion of what they deem important truths, and for the practical application of those truths to the improvement of their own lives, and to the good of their fellow-beings.

To this end it is essential that they who attempt to co-operate should be agreed in perception of the truths they wish to promote, and in the desire for self-improvement in conformity therewith; also in the methods by which they will seek to apply these truths to life, for the benefit of themselves and others. Otherwise attempts at close association and united work will

lead inevitably to perpetual disputes over questions of principle and of method, resulting in divisions and antagonisms, and the paralysis of all practical endeavor. Such questions should be settled in each mind before essaying to combine with others, and they only who find themselves in essential accord can profitably unite for practical ends.

It is indispensable, therefore, that persons who seek to act associatively for useful purposes should first carefully consider and adopt a well-digested and clearly-expressed statement of the Principles or Basic Truths which they regard as essential to true living, and which rationally lead to the course of action they propose to follow; also, the main objects they have in view, and an outline, at least, of the methods they think proper to pursue for reaching the desired ends.

The chief use of a Statement of Principles — or Creed, if any choose so to term it — is simply to secure substantial agreement among those who propose to work together as to what are deemed fundamental practical truths. It does not by any means imply that the statement agreed upon is absolute and final truth, or the whole of truth, nor that it cannot be altered or enlarged as knowledge increases and perceptions grow clearer. Nor does it imply any censure or condemnation upon such as are unable to accept it, or any part of it. It is merely a platform for present united earnest endeavor, to be extended and improved whenever this is found desirable.

Sincere persons who cannot indorse one statement, or work on one platform, have full liberty to construct a better, and to find co-operators thereon, if they can; and that platform which embodies the most of vital truth and practical utility may be expected to illustrate the law of the survival of the fittest. And while different bodies of workers may be unable, from differences in mental bias or education, to see alike in all respects as to Principles and Methods, yet they may fellowship, encourage, and rejoice in each other's work in so far as it benefits the common humanity.

The cry of "No Creed," or "No Principles," as applied to any working association, is an absurdity. Only infants, idiots, mental imbeciles, and moral drones have no convictions. Such have no place and no use in a working body, except as learners; and for these a suitable place should be provided.

A statement of principles for the purpose above indicated should be brief, tersely but clearly expressed, and limited to such cardinal truths as have *a direct bearing on life and its duties;* and these truths should be mainly of an axiomatic or

easily demonstrable character, avoiding as far as may be mere theories and questions of doubtful utility.

Spiritualists proposing to organize for mutual culture should remember that the great truths of spirit communion, present inspiration, and exercise of the spiritual gifts — which they are wont to specially emphasize in consequence of their general denial or ignoring by others — are by no means the only truths essential to a noble and worthy life, though they are important factors in any systematic statement of spiritual truth. These should be given their due recognition, but not to the exclusion of the fundamental principles of ethics and of true religion.

The subjoined statement, intended for advanced and thoughtful Spiritualists, has been drawn up with reference to the foregoing considerations, and should be judged of accordingly.

It will be noted that the first paragraph asserts what is regarded as the proper and most potential basis of morals or ethics; the second affirms the ground of rational and vital religion; the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth set forth the distinctive truths of modern Spiritualism; while the remainder express other principles of scarcely less importance to a well-balanced character.

An effort has been made to avoid, as far as possible, the use of antiquated and thread-bare phraseology, and to state each proposition with simplicity and clearness, and with as much brevity as is consistent with these.

If it be objected by any that the statement as a whole is *too religious* in its bearing, the writer has only to say that much observation and experience have taught him that only those who have come to feel the softening and unitizing as well as energizing power of real religion are prepared for any earnest co-operation, especially in the line of personal improvement and humanitary work. Others have little motive or fitness for united action.

Where no other name has been fixed upon, the writer would suggest that of a "Society for Ethical and Spiritual Culture" as not unsuitable. Societies for "Ethical Culture" already exist in some of our large cities, and are doing a very praiseworthy work in an educational and philanthropic way, particularly among the poor and neglected classes. But so far as the writer is informed, these societies are agnostic — wholly ignoring the spiritual nature and immortal destiny of man, and all the aids and incentives to be drawn from the future and higher life. Consequently, they can present no sustaining assurances of a better world to afflicted souls, can offer little, if any, consolation

to bereaved hearts, and can draw no inspiring motives from the great hereafter. Spiritualists, surely, have cause to exhibit equal zeal and devotion to the welfare of the human brotherhood in this life, with the added stimulus supplied by the conviction that the character formed here determines for an indefinite period the realizations of a future life. Societies for Ethical *and* Spiritual Culture may properly take into view the whole field of human capacities and needs — physical, mental, moral, and religious as well as spiritual — since the best spiritual culture depends largely upon that of all the other departments of being.

Of course, persons who are agreed on any part of this platform are at liberty to unite on such part, and discard the remainder if they choose. The writer would be glad to co-operate with any number of earnest souls who are heartily in unison on the basis of the first proposition alone — Human Brotherhood and its requirements. A very noble humanitary work could be done by co-operation on that single plank. But those who are agreed on the second also would have a still closer and stronger bond of union, with one less ground of possible disharmony. So of each and all of the twelve propositions which, together, form the basis for a very compact and vigorous association.

With these preliminaries, the subjoined statement is submitted to the consideration of the thoughtful.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES.

The following primary truths and practical deductions therefrom are deemed either self-evident or capable of being established by conclusive proofs: —

1. *Brotherhood of Mankind.*— The human race is one family or brotherhood, whose true interests and welfare are ever closely interblended, so that if one member suffers all suffer in a measure with that one. Hence it is both the duty and the highest interest of every individual not only to refrain from what would harm or wrong another, but *to live for the good of all*, especially seeking to aid the unfortunate, to teach the ignorant, and to raise the degraded.

2. *Parenthood of Deity.* — As human beings we are offspring of a Supreme Power and Intelligence, which consequently sustains to us and to all finite beings the intimate relation of universal Parent — our Father and Mother in one — whose will, wisdom, and goodness are expressed in the constitution and laws of the universe and of our being, physical, moral, and spiritual;

which laws tend to effect eventually the highest welfare and happiness of all. Hence this Supreme Power, however named or imperfectly comprehended, being the Source of all Life, Beauty, and Beneficence, is worthy of our highest reverence, aspiration, trust, and love.

3. *Continuity of Life.* — As offspring of the Infinite Life, we may expect that an endless existence is before us, in a universe peopled with various orders or grades of being, wherein the position and enjoyments of each individual are determined for an indefinite period of the future by the deeds and aspirations of the present. Wherefore it behooves us to make the worthiest possible use of our earthly lives.

4. *Possibilities of Progress.* — Human beings are capable of unlimited progress in knowledge, wisdom, beauty, and symmetry of character, and usefulness to others, to be attained by the progressive ascendency of the rational and spiritual elements of being over the animal and selfish. Hence the desirableness of unremitting and well-rounded culture of all the nobler capabilities of our nature, among which the moral sentiments and spiritual graces stand pre-eminent.

5. *Aids to Progress.* — For our help in this upward progress, angelic ministrations, divine inspirations, and various "spiritual gifts" are ever available to those who seek them. Wherefore it behooves us to welcome angelic messengers, to "quench not the spirit," to "despise not prophesyings," and to "covet earnestly the best gifts," using these for no selfish or unworthy ends, but for "edification," or upbuilding in good and truth.

6. *Communion with Spirits.* — Intelligible and realized communication with those who have thrown off the veil of flesh is possible under suitable conditions, and is a rightful privilege of high value to those who use it wisely, but fraught with danger in its misuse, on account of the diverse characters of invisible beings. Hence the importance of seeking such communion by wise methods only, and with the purest motives, and of pursuing that alone which is elevating and useful in tendency.

7. *The Source of Authority.* — All truth, from whatever source derived, is of divine origin, and absolutely authoritative to the soul that perceives it; but no man, or body of men, is competent to prescribe authoritatively what others shall accept as truth, nor can we reasonably expect to find it, unmixed with error, in any book produced by human instrumentality. Hence each person should exercise his or her own truth-determining powers, according to individual ability, each being ever amenable to the supreme laws of the universe.

8. *Freedom and Obligation.*— Freedom of thought and action is the birthright of every soul, and the indispensable condition of the best progress in purity and goodness; yet true freedom is neither anarchy nor license, but necessitates restraint from any infringement on the rightful liberties or the welfare of others. Hence a careful regard to the requirements of brotherhood, with fidelity to the duties of all other relations, are obligations inherent in the conditions of our existence.

9. *Awards or Consequences.*— By the operation of laws written in our physical and spiritual constitutions, all right actions and all wrong doings are followed, sooner or later, by results of elevation and joy in the one case, or of degradation and suffering in the other. Therefore, happiness or misery, "heaven" or "hell," in this world, or that which is to come, is not the arbitrary award of Deity, but the necessary consequence of individual action or of spiritual state.

10. *Salvation.*— In its true sense, "salvation" implies knowledge of and conformity to the conditions of right living in all departments, physical, mental, moral, and spiritual; and it is to be sought in this life as well as in the next. Therefore, belief in and obedience to the beneficent laws of our being — or both "faith" and "works" — are indispensable to real salvation, here or hereafter.

11. *Saviors.* —Whoever, through mental enlightenment and spiritual attainment, becomes capable of imparting saving truth and spiritual energy to others becomes in a true sense a savior of others. Hence we gratefully recognize many saviors of mankind in the past, and deem it the privilege as well as duty of all to aspire to that high service to their kind.

12. *The Christ.*— In Jesus of Nazareth, styled "The Christ" or "The Anointed," as set forth in the gospel narratives (whether these be regarded as wholly historical or partly ideal), we recognize a noble portraiture of Spiritual Manhood,— at once "Son of Man" and "Son of God," — a teacher of truth and righteousness, who was specially "anointed" with the spirit of universal love, declaring the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Men in a dark and cruel era, and becoming a savior to all who have received and practiced the saving truths he taught. Wherefore we honor the Nazarene as an exemplar of the Christ-spirit, which is the spirit of all-embracing, self-sacrificing, out-going love, with loyalty to truth, constituting the "Christ within"; and we aspire to attain the same spirit as the only power which can redeem ourselves and our race from the ills of this rudimental existence.

CONSTITUTION.

[A Constitution for a society, based on the foregoing principles, should be prefaced by a Preamble, somewhat as follows:]

PREAMBLE.

Believing that the chief ends of existence are improvement to ourselves and usefulness to our fellow-beings, and that these ends can be better secured in fraternal co-operation than by mere individual effort; also, aware that we can hope to co-operate harmoniously and effectively only as we are agreed in the fundamental convictions from which our efforts spring; we, the undersigned, finding ourselves in substantial accord with the principles of Truth and of Action set forth in the foregoing Statement, agree to constitute ourselves an organized body under the name and for the purposes stated in the following

ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION.

[Art. I. should state the name adopted, and Art. II. should set forth the Objects and Methods proposed,— for which the following may serve as a model:]

Art. II. *Objects and Methods.* — The objects of this Society shall be mutual co-operation: first, to promote the personal improvement and usefulness of its members, by providing means for Ethical and Spiritual Culture, and modes of judicious Practical Philanthropy, in accordance with the Principles avowed in the preceding statement; secondly, to disseminate these Principles and promote their practice for the general good; thirdly, to search for the discovery of further useful truth; and, fourthly, to co-operate fraternally with other bodies or individuals having similar objects in view, when deemed expedient.

These objects shall be sought by the following methods, or such of them as may be found practicable; namely, the provision of lectures, public or private; the institution of *conversaziones* and social gatherings, and of classes for special culture, instruction, or inquiry; the circulation of appropriate literature; the provision of a free library and reading-room; the institution of means for the education of the young, and for the relief of suffering; and by such other measures as may be agreed upon.

[This Constitution should be completed by Articles providing for terms of Membership; Officers, their Duties, and mode of Election; Business and other meetings; Committees or Bands of Workers for the various branches of effort to be undertaken; Withdrawal from Membership; Amendments to Constitution or to Statement of Principles, etc., — all of which may be varied according to circumstances and the work to be attempted.]

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